

Aging in Place in the Community and Planning Committee
Minutes
October 11, 2016

Commissioners present: Richard Jourdenais, Charles Kauffman, Miriam Kelty, Bonnie Klem, Judy Peres, Mary Petrizzo, Monica Schaffer, Isabelle Schoenfeld
Guests: Marsha Weber, Leslie Marks
Staff: Pazit Aviv

After Introductions, the AIPCP discussed the September 2016 Annual Meeting of the Commission on Aging. New Commissioners were asked about their perceptions of the meeting and its usefulness to them. There was agreement that it was beneficial to hear the agendas and priorities of Montgomery County government departments' staff and those of the elected officials. However, all the new Commissioners felt that more information was presented than could be absorbed, there were no breaks to think about what was presented, and too little time for discussion and to decide on CoA priorities.

It was recommended that if similar meetings are to be held in the future, they be 1.5 days with substantially more time scheduled for discussion. Discussion of major items was too short. It was felt that it is important to relate information transmitted to CoA priorities and to how the CoA should go forward in the coming year or two. Two options to make the Annual Meeting more meaningful were recommended:

Recommendation: It was recommended that the CoA follow-up the Annual Meeting with a discussion of the recommendations being forwarded.

Recommendation: It was recommended that a Summer Study be planned to brief CoA members about Montgomery County departments' responsibilities, accomplishments and needs as they relate to our older residents. Such a study/briefing or orientation with Montgomery County officials and department heads should be followed up with 2-3 discussion sessions to avoid information overload.

Recommendation: It was recommended that decisions on budget items should be preceded by consideration of one-page briefing papers from each department.

More experienced attendees noted that the priorities developed have already gone forward and that testimony has been developed. In response, several Commissioners recommended that the Annual Meeting be held in the spring so that there is time for Commissioners to have meaningful input into priorities and budget recommendations. Confusion was expressed about where priorities and needs come from, specifically how much is decided by staff vs Commissioners.

The discussion moved to the top priority for all DHHS that was identified by Uma Ahluwalia: affordable housing and homelessness. It was noted that this is the first time that a single major priority has been articulated. It is clearly within the purview of the Department of Housing and Community Affairs. Leslie Marks informed the Committee that the Age Friendly Housing Working Group has formulated three priorities: affordable housing (including home sharing), promote aging in place with wrap-around services, and affordable assisted living.

It is unlikely that the County can resolve the shortage of affordable housing without federal and for-profit and non-profit private sector collaboration. Montgomery County currently supports tax credit incentives. The MDPU program is of limited benefit to senior residents because that program cannot discriminate on the basis of age. Five projects are now in process or under consideration. Citizen input is being sought but such input extends the time it takes for a project to be implemented to c. 5 years.

The Working Group made home sharing a priority as a way to increase availability of affordable housing. There is a national organization that promotes home sharing, an ongoing project in Baltimore that is being looked into and the JCA has expressed interest in managing a home share program should support be found. The DHCA and Age Friendly working group also is exploring working with faith-based organizations. It was noted that there are many options in shared housing: seniors with other seniors or non-seniors, seniors with caregivers with or without their families, and sharing single family and high-rise housing stock. The Working Group is committed to public-private partnerships and will define action steps for the next few years as it develops its input into the strategic plan for Age Friendly Montgomery.

Ms. Marks herself promotes affordable assisted living, pointing out that there is no place for elders in affordable county housing to go when they can no longer live independently.

To create affordable rental housing, incentives for builders may be critical. However, in new high-rise construction, the current trend is to build small units but offer a lot of common space for kitchens, dining, library, and entertaining. Another approach is to expand the use of accessory apartments.

The issue of rent stabilization was raised. It was pointed out that Mr. Leggett, at the annual Meeting, said he had met with rental building owners to discuss this and encouraged the CoA to follow up. Ms. Marks said that the DHCA has taken no position on rent stabilization. A Commissioner pointed out that shared housing and new affordable housing will not keep pace with need to affordable rental housing in Montgomery County and that rental increases must be addressed. Aside from housing per se, it was noted that affordable housing and an educated labor force are critical for economic growth of Montgomery County.

Recommendation: The CoA should conduct a Summer Study on affordable housing and rent stabilization.

Recommendation: AIPC should meet with the rent stabilization group and identify the building owners who met with Mr. Leggett to follow up with them.

Leslie Marks continued to say that the Working Group is supporting Nexus Montgomery, Johns Hopkins Health's Capable and similar programs that might deliver wrap around services, particularly medication management. The proposal is to have medication management functions co-located in existing affordable housing communities. A Commissioner pointed out that medication management and house calls are very important for seniors and that the JCA program sends a pharmacist and nurse to homes for this purpose. The Baltimore-based Primary Care Coalition has taken the lead on this project and the Nexus program will become involved.

The Nursing Summer Study done two years ago found that consumers prefer small group homes to larger facilities. It can be inferred that the same would hold true for assisted living. Affordable assisted living is in short supply.

After discussion and information about other programs, the Committee acknowledged that it needs some data to inform further discussion. For example, the displacement rate for long-term tenants.

Recommendation: It was recommended that AIPCP invite rental property owners to meet with the Committee to inform us of their challenges. AIPCP should find out which owners Mr. Leggett met with and follow up with them. Ms. Marks said that major owners include Bozzuto, Montgomery Housing Partnerships, Southern Management and Grady. She suggested we might also invite somebody from the Apartment Owners and Builders Association. The Committee agreed that following a meeting with owners, AIPCP should consider another meeting with tenant associations.

The group noted that it has had several discussions about rental housing and rate increases and rent stabilization. It was agreed that those of us who participated in those discussions would review back notes and data and bring relevant information to our next meeting.